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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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MEMORANDUM

Moscow in Asia: Why Not Overtures to Indonesia and North
Korea?

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Introduction and Summary

As Moscow looks at the Far East, its position must seem bleak. Relations with China are at the lowest point in a decade, Japan is intensifying its defense preparations and Soviet relations with the ASEAN states are limited and cool. Above all, the closer ties between Beijing, Tokyo and Washington are based on the presumption that Moscow is the antagonist. The Soviets can point to their deepening relationship with Vietnam as the only bright spot on this generally dark horizon.

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The Soviets almost certainly assess from time to time the feasibility of developing new relationships to counter this trend. North Korea and Indonesia present possibilities for new overtures, but in both cases there are significant constraints that make major Soviet demarches unlikely.

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Initiative Toward Indonesia

Soviet-Indonesian relations are cool and Moscow would like to improve them to advance Soviet interests in South-east Asia and to undercut those of Beijing. Moscow probably sees Indonesia's long-standing fear of Chinese expansionism in Southeast Asia as an opening to a closer relationship.

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This memorandum was prepared by Office of Political Analysis, USSR-EE Division at the request of Michael A. Armacost, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, OPA/USSR-EE/Soviet External Branch

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Other factors, however, have militated against this. The anti-Communist regime in Jakarta has become increasingly nervous about the burgeoning Soviet relationship with Hanoi and the near permanent presence of Soviet warships in the South China Sea. This concern has become more acute in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Soviet-Vietnamese agreement of last July on oil exploration; the Indonesians fear the exploration agreement may involve waters whose sovereignty Jakarta disputes with Hanoi. Another factor in Jakarta's reticence is a concern about Soviet meddling in Indonesian internal affairs, especially in light of the elections scheduled for 1982. [REDACTED]

25X1

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Soviet attempts to justify the invasion of Afghanistan met open criticism from Jakarta, and Indonesians have consistently criticized Moscow's support for Vietnamese expansion in Indochina. [REDACTED]

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A significant warming in Soviet-Indonesian relations over the near term, therefore, seems unlikely. Moreover, the Soviets are not, to our knowledge, making any extensive new efforts to woo the Indonesians. Even if they should, the Indonesians are unlikely to be responsive. This might change if Indonesia's fear of Chinese intentions ever outweighs its concerns about the Soviet presence in Southeast Asia but for the moment this possibility appears remote. [REDACTED]

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An Overture to North Korea

Soviet relations with North Korea are also cool. The Soviet Union is the major supplier of advanced military equipment and industrial goods to North Korea, but P'yongyang tilts toward Beijing and its position on key foreign policy issues relating to Asia is pro-Chinese. P'yongyang refused to condemn China's invasion of Vietnam and continues to support the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea. North Korea has also criticized Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea and is unwilling to endorse the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

25X1

Moscow has made no significant overtures to improve relations with North Korea. In fact, the initiative to improve Soviet-North Korean relations, where it does exist, appears to be coming from P'yongyang in an effort to balance its tilt toward China. Moscow, however, has not responded

25X1

to these feelers. [REDACTED]

25X1

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[REDACTED] Moscow sent only a middle-level Politburo member--Moscow Party Chief Grishin, who has no foreign policy responsibility--to the recent Korean party congress. Grishin's remarks while in P'yongyang made it clear that the two sides continue to differ on a number of issues. [REDACTED]

25X1

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There is little pressure on Moscow to compete with the Chinese for P'yongyang's favor. The Soviets know that P'yongyang does not want to be completely dependent on China. Moscow also recognizes that Beijing cannot provide the military wherewithal that North Korea needs to establish military superiority on the Korean peninsula and, in any event, is unwilling to give P'yongyang such blanket support. [REDACTED]

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It is also very risky for Moscow to make any serious attempt to improve relations with North Korea. To win decisive influence in P'yongyang, Moscow would have to back Kim's near obsession with reunification. This would entail providing more sophisticated arms and other tangible help. Moscow is unwilling to provide this kind of support, however, out of fear that Kim Il-song would use it to provoke a conflict on the Korean peninsula. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets are aware that, in view of the US combat presence in South Korea, a war there would automatically draw in the United States and would add yet another irritant to Moscow's relations with both the United States and Japan. No matter how isolated the USSR is in Asia at this time, the Soviets are anxious to avoid entanglement in a confrontation with the United States in Northern Asia. In line with this policy, Moscow has not delivered significant new weapons systems to North Korea since 1974. [REDACTED]

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Soviet policy toward North Korea is thus unlikely to change--at least until Kim Il-song leaves the scene. Moscow seems content to give North Korea sufficient economic aid and military equipment to maintain a degree of influence in North Korea but not enough to alter the military balance and stability on the peninsula. With no new Soviet approach to P'yongyang on the horizon, Soviet-North Korean relations are likely to remain poor and plagued by mutual distrust. [REDACTED]

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